

THE ORIGIN OF THE TRIBAL BOUNDARIES IN JOSHUA: ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS OR SACRAL GEOGRAPHY?

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Chapters 13-19 of the book of Joshua describe the division of the Promised Land between the Israelite tribes. The allotment of the Transjordan by Moses is described in chapter 13, and the allotment of the Cisjordan by Joshua in chapters 14-19. The allotment of Cisjordan is effected in two stages (chapters 14-17 and 18-19, respectively). The narrative places the first stage at Gilgal (14:6), and the second in Shiloh (18:1, 19:51). Embedded in the narrative are (a) tribal boundary descriptions and (b) lists of towns allotted to a particular tribe.

The boundary descriptions are built according to a specific pattern: each description is a list of geographic points linked together by verbs of movement (the boundary is described as “going” from one point to another). Outside Joshua 15-19 we encounter this pattern only in Num 34:3-12, where it is used to delineate the boundaries of the Promised Land as a whole. This pattern is not used in the description of the Transjordan territories. We have general statements about the division of the Transjordan, lists of towns belonging to Transjordanian tribes, but in sharp contrast with the Cisjordan, the boundaries between these tribes are not specified.

The boundaries of Judah (15:1-12) and Benjamin (18:11-20) are described in a relatively thorough way on all four sides (just as the boundaries of the Land as a whole in Num 34:3-12). The boundaries of Ephraim and Manasseh (16:1-3, 5-8, 17:7-11) as well as those of the four Galilean tribes (19:10-14, 22, 26-29, 33-34) are treated in a very sketchy way. For example, the western half of Ephraim's southern border is described as going from the environs of Beth-Horon to Gezer and then to the sea, without any further details.

Two Cisjordan tribes are left without even an attempt at boundary description: Simeon and Dan. In the case of Simeon this is explained by the fact that the territory of Simeon, as depicted in Joshua, is an integral part of the territory of Judah (the towns listed as belonging to Simeon, 19:1-9, are earlier listed as belonging to Judah, 15:20-63). This makes any boundary line between Judah and Simeon impossible.

As for Dan, the Biblical traditions linked the name of the tribe with two non-contiguous places, the Shephelah and the northern city of Dan. The book of Joshua gives a list of the Danite towns in the Shephelah (19:40-46), then narrates the Danite conquest of the city of Laish (Dan), but refrains from describing the boundaries of this tribe in either of these two areas. It seems, however, that the author of Joshua 15-17 left a gap between the southern

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On the opposite page: The boundaries of the Cisjordanian tribes in Joshua 13-19. The course of the boundaries on the map mostly follows Kallai 1986, but unlike Kallai we show the gap between the southern boundary of Ephraim and the northern boundary of Judah. The double pecked line marks the boundaries that are hinted at rather than described.

boundary of Ephraim and the northern boundary of Judah. This gap partly corresponds with the region of the Shephelah that is traditionally associated with Dan.

The list of towns belonging to Judah is extremely detailed (15:20-61), less so the lists of towns belonging to other tribes. Strangely, for the two main tribes of the kingdom of Israel, Ephraim and Manasseh, no town lists are given at all.

The origin of the geographical material in Joshua 13-19

It is usually taken for granted that the tribal geography of Joshua (both boundary system and town lists) has no connection whatsoever with the narrative of the book, with its ideology and theology ("As long recognized, the topographical lists have no integral relationship to their setting in the Conquest narrative"¹). Both town lists and boundary descriptions are thought to have existed as independent documents long before their integration into the book of Joshua. Presumably they were of an administrative nature ("It appears that the tribal boundary descriptions served in their administrative context ... for the purpose of taxation")². The Biblical context is secondary for these descriptions, but it re-interprets them, turning administrative documents into sacred texts ("In the Bible, in their secondary literary function, the tribal boundary descriptions express the religious worldview linked to the triad God-People-Land").³ The town lists, at least those of Judah and Benjamin, are usually dated to the time of the late Judean monarchy⁴. Various historical settings have been suggested for the boundary descriptions, such as an inter-tribal agreement from the time of the Judges⁵, or David's census⁶.

As for the town lists, especially the lists of Judean towns, their administrative origin is quite plausible. But with regard to the boundary descriptions, the situation is different. The very form of the boundary descriptions in Joshua is without any parallel in the world of the Ancient Near East, and their presumed administrative or fiscal function is unclear. Perhaps the Bible (or, more specifically, the Deuteronomistic history work, the book of Joshua) was not after all secondary, but was the original context of the boundary descriptions? Below we shall identify the features of the boundary descriptions in Joshua that seem to suit the theological, ideological and literary context of the Bible better than the political or administrative situation of the Iron Age.

Does the character of the boundary descriptions fit administrative or political documents?

The most obvious argument against interpreting the boundary descriptions of Joshua as extracts from political or administrative documents has been advanced already by Kaufmann: "political and administrative boundaries should be clear and unambiguous, which the boundaries of Joshua are not".⁷ Some parts of the boundaries, stretching over dozens of kilometers, are described in rather general terms, with a minimal number of points mentioned. Even with regard to the points mentioned, it is often unclear on which side of the border they lie. This concerns even important towns such as Beth-Shemesh (15:10), Timnah (15:10),

¹ Cross and Wright 1956, 203.

² Wazana 2000, 186

³ Wazana 2000, 186

⁴ E.g. Na'aman 1986.

⁵ E.g. Noth 1953, Aharoni 1967.

⁶ E.g. Kallai 1986, Na'aman 1986.

⁷ Kaufmann 1953, 31.

Jabneel (15:11), and Gezer (16:3). Such a vague boundary description, instead of settling border disputes, would rather have provoked them!

It is true that some sectors of some boundaries are depicted with extreme thoroughness (for example, in the environs of Jebus/Jerusalem). But if the boundary system had gone back to an administrative or political document dealing with all of the land of Israel, we would have expected a certain degree of precision throughout the whole system.

The descriptions of actual political borders in the Ancient Near East are very different. Below is a quotation from a Hittite document describing the borders of the vassal Hittite kingdom of Tarhuntassa:

“In the direction of the border district of the land of Pitassa, his frontier is the sinkhole of the city of Arimatta, but Arimatta belongs to the land of Pitassa. In the direction of Mount Huwatnuwanta, his frontier is the *hallapuwanza*, but the *hallapuwanza* belongs to the land of the Hulaya River.”⁸ Everything is stated unambiguously. Every frontier is described by two reference points: one inside, the other outside the border.

There is a fragment in the Joshua boundary descriptions, that astonishingly resembles the Hittite boundary description, even from the point of view of syntax, namely the border between Ephraim and Manasseh in the area of Tappuah and Wadi Kanah (17:8-10⁹). But this is the *only* such fragment. Other boundary descriptions are formulated in a much less precise way.

What might have been the Sitz im Leben of the boundary system?

The suggestion that the Joshua boundary descriptions go back to a covenantal document of the pre-monarchic Israelite tribal league was advocated by Alt and Noth. This suggestion has been abandoned since the collapse of Noth’s hypothesis of the “Israelite amphictyony”. In general, written documents describing the borders between tribes that have not yet achieved statehood are unheard of in the world of the Ancient Near East. Na’aman has rightly pointed out that the basic assumptions behind the idea of a written intertribal agreement from the time of the Judges are historically unacceptable¹⁰.

Another suggestion, namely that the boundary descriptions go back to the documents that fixed the internal administrative boundaries of the United Monarchy, is even more questionable. Even in the highly bureaucratic civilizations of ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia the borders between different administrative districts *of the same kingdom* were not required to be fixed by any special document. Though we have some examples of boundary descriptions from the Ancient Near East¹¹, they deal with *inter-state* borders, not with borders between administrative units of the same kingdom¹². This is understandable. In our day the

⁸ Beckman 1996, 104.

⁹ See detailed treatment of this similarity in Wazana 2000, 184.

¹⁰ Na’aman 1986, 82-84.

¹¹ See overview in Hess 1994a and 1994b.

¹² Sometimes the borders described in the treaties between the Hittite kings and their vassals are treated as internal borders of the Hittite Empire and might, therefore, be claimed as parallels to the hypothetical administrative boundaries of the Israelite kingdom (Wazana 2000). But even the vassal kingdoms of Carchemish and Tarhuntassa, dependent on the Hittite empire and ruled by the princes of the Hittite king’s dynasty, were still kingdoms, not provinces. “Due to their peculiar position as both rulers of semi-independent countries and as members of the Hittite royal family, the kings of Tarhuntassa and Carchemish received treaties which contain elements otherwise typical of Hittite international treaties” (Beckman 1996, 102).

situation is the same: interstate borders are fixed by detailed treaties, while the boundaries between administrative regions of the same state deserve much less attention.

One can reasonably doubt whether in the Israelite or Judean chanceries there was any need for the detailed written fixating of the inter-tribal boundaries. Rather, it was the theology of the land that motivated this need in the biblical tradition.

Tribal boundaries and the theology of the Land

The major topic of the whole corpus of the Pentateuch through Kings is the Covenant between God and Israel. All the terms of the Covenant must be precise and detailed. Thus, the Bible includes both a detailed treatment of the human obligations (the Law) and a detailed description of the boundaries of the Land, the divine gift to Israel. The geographical and legislative materials balance each other within the framework formed by the narrative. The need to describe in detail the boundaries of the Land is theologically motivated.

Hess¹³ compares the Land gift in the Hebrew Bible with the land transactions in the Ancient Near East, which described the property in question from several sides, in detail. This is the pattern used in Num 34:1-12: the "property" is described on all four sides, in detail. However, in the Bible, the benefactor of the gift is not a single person, but a group of tribes. This requires that the delineation of external boundaries of the Promised Land be supplemented by the detailed delineation of internal boundaries, that is, between different tribal allotments¹⁴.

The nature of the boundaries of the Land in Num 34:1-12

It is interesting that in Num 34 the Biblical writer does not fail to mention that the western boundary of the Land is the sea. This information is important for the theological notion of the Promised Land, and for Israel's claims on the coastal plain, but it is difficult to imagine an interstate agreement or administrative document that would require it.

Hutchens convincingly argues for a cultic interpretation of Num 34:1-12. The following argument against looking for a political or administrative origin of the boundaries of the Land in Num 34:1-12 deserves citing: "These boundaries depart from the historical boundaries of Israel in at least two areas. First, they exclude the central and southern Transjordan regions known to have been controlled by Israel at various times in its history. Secondly, they include within the boundaries the coastal area, which was historically dominated by the Philistines and Phoenicians during Israel's period of statehood"¹⁵.

It has sometimes been suggested (e.g. by Kallai 1981, 77 and by Na'aman 1986, 63) that the extent of the Promised Land in the Bible tradition corresponds to the traditional notion of "the land of Canaan", which, in turn, reflects the borders of the Late Bronze Age Egyptian province of "Canaan". However in the east the Egyptian control should have extended beyond the boundaries outlined in Numbers.

It may well be that in the days of the Omrides Judah was a vassal of Israel, ruled by kings who were relatives of their overlords. In this particular case the relationships between Judah and Israel at that time may have resembled those between Tarhuntassa and the Hittite kingdom. But neither Biblical nor extra-Biblical material permits us to suggest that Benjamin, Manasseh, or the Galilean tribes were ever treated by Israelite monarchs as semi-independent kingdoms, whose kings were to sign treaties with the kings of Israel and to describe in these treaties the boundaries of their kingdoms.

¹³ Hess 1994a; see also Hess 2002 (according to Hess, the form of the royal land grant remains the closest to Joshua 13-19).

¹⁴ See the treatment of the topic in Kitz 2000.

¹⁵ Hutchens 1993, 227.

The exact literary relationship between the description of the boundaries of the Land in Num 34:1-12 and the tribal boundary descriptions of Joshua is debatable: there may be arguments for literary dependence of the Joshua boundaries on Num 34:1-12¹⁶. In any case, it is clear that in the Bible these descriptions complement each other. The theological (not administrative or political) character of Num 34:1-12 speaks in favor of a theological (not administrative or political) character for the Joshua boundaries as well.

Some of the arguments against political or administrative background of Num 34:1-12 are also relevant for Josh 15-19.

The case of Philistia

The idealized extent of the Promised Land influenced the description of the southern boundary of Judah (Josh 15:2-4). This boundary corresponds almost exactly with the southern boundary of the Promised Land in Num 34:3-5 and also encompasses Philistia. As Na'aman rightly states in discussing the Judean boundaries, the attachment of the kingdoms of Philistia to Judah's allotment should be regarded as "a result of the bias of the author of the system... an instance of his tendency to include in the system theoretical rather than actual situations"¹⁷.

But it is not the only instance where the boundary system of Joshua is affected by theological and political conceptions of the author(s).

The case of the Transjordan

The Transjordan is not regarded in the Joshua narratives as part of the Promised Land. Josh 1:2 clearly presupposes that "the land God is giving to the people" begins to the west of the Jordan river. The crossing of the Jordan means the end of the wanderings, marked by the cessation of the manna (Josh 5:12). It also means the beginning of a new dispensation, marked by circumcision and celebration of the Passover (Josh 5:2-11: could these acts have been performed before Israel entered the Land)¹⁸.

Within the story of the Land allotment, different status of the lands to the west and to the east of the Jordan is reflected in the fact that the Transjordan inheritances are given to the two and one-half tribes by Moses without consulting the lot, while the Cisjordan is divided for

¹⁶ The southern boundary of Judah (Josh 15:2-4) coincides with the southern boundary of the Promised Land in Num 34:3-5 as far as the geographical points mentioned are concerned, with only minor variations. However, the verbs linking these points to one another in the two texts are completely different. This caused Noth (1935, 187-189) to suggest that the boundary descriptions both in Num 34 and in Joshua should go back to some earlier lists that contained only boundary points, without connecting verbs. A deliberate changing of the verbs by a scribe may be an alternative solution. Compare the description of the northern boundary of Judah (Josh 15) with that of the southern boundary of Benjamin.

The sentence *ze yihye lākem gəbūl neqeb* in Josh 15:4 deserves close attention. Otherwise the direct address to the Israelites does not occur in the boundary descriptions of Joshua, but is at home in the boundary descriptions of Num 34:3-12 (*lākem* occurs 11 times in these verses). This may indicate that the current description of the southern boundary of Judah in Joshua is secondary to the southern boundary of the Promised Land in Numbers. Auld (1980, 76) indicates the possibility that the two texts may have influenced each other even after they had been set in their present literary frameworks.

¹⁷ Na'aman 1986, 91.

¹⁸ A detailed case for the Transjordan not being part of the Promised Land outside of Deuteronomy was made by Weinfeld (1983, 59-60). On the contrary, Deut 2-3 and 34, according to Weinfeld (1983, 67-69) treat the Transjordan as part of the Promised Land. Whatever may be the reason for a different treatment of the Transjordan in these chapters of Deuteronomy, it is not relevant to the present paper.

the nine and one-half tribes by lot¹⁹. The difference is significant: the lot directly indicates the will of God²⁰. God was not directly involved in the division of the land of the former kingdoms of Sihon and Og, but when it comes to the division of the Promised Land itself, he is the one who sets the boundaries.

There is a correlation between the different status of the Trans- and Cisjordan in the narrative, on the one hand, and their different treatment in the geographical descriptions of Joshua, on the other. "In striking contrast to the allotments in western Palestine (Canaan proper), to be described in chap. 15-19, there is no attempt here to depict boundaries," writes Boling in his commentary on Joshua, speaking about Transjordan²¹. "It is most instructive to note that the descriptions of the Transjordanian tribes in Josh 13 lack boundary delineations" notes Aharoni²².

Different historical explanations have been given to this phenomenon, but the most natural, to my mind, is the literary one: the Transjordan is not a part of the Promised Land, therefore, quite logically, there is no reason at all for the system that divides the Promised Land by divinely prescribed borders to deal with the Transjordan.

To the best of our knowledge, there was not a single period in the history of Palestine, when Israel (or Judah) controlled all (or most) of the Cisjordan without having any grip on the Transjordan. Thus the exclusion of the Transjordan from the Joshua boundary system should be regarded as dependent on the theological notion of the Promised Land and not on any political reality of the Iron Age.

The highlands and the plains

In the Biblical tradition the Israelite tribes are associated primarily with the highlands, either with the Central Highlands or with Galilee (Asher, associated with the northern coastal region, seems to be the only exception). The Syrians say about Israel: "Their God is the God of the mountains" (1 Kings 20:23). "The land of Judah", "Mount Judah", "the land of Ephraim", "Mount Ephraim", "the land of Benjamin", "the land of Naphthali", "the land of Zebulun" are well-known traditional territorial entities for the historical books of the Bible and for the Old Testament prophets. All of these areas are located in the highlands.

The author(s) of the geographical chapters of Joshua adopted the common division of the highlands into areas traditionally associated with different tribes. The boundary system, however, is designed to cover the whole of the Cisjordan, without any remainder, and this means that the plains are somehow to be divided among the Israelite tribes. Indeed, they are included in the tribal inheritances, though they are always on the periphery. The course of the tribal borders in the coastal plain is indicated extremely schematically. South of Carmel, the plain is just divided in parallel areas running east-west, assigned to the tribes whose heartland is far away, in the highlands. The author does not bother too much about the details. After the boundaries (whose course in this region is invariably described from east to west) reach the coastal plain, he just states: "and the boundary continues to the Sea" (with slight variations). The rather detailed description of the northern boundary of Judah, which is traced from the

¹⁹ This observation is not invalidated even if we accept Auld's suggestion (1980, 56) that the principle of lot in Josh 13-19 was a later insertion. Our thesis is that the sharp distinction of Cis- and Transjordan characterized all stages of the development of the text of Joshua.

²⁰ "Use of the sacred lot to distribute the land (14:2;19:51) communicates that the authority of Yahweh stands behind Israel's settlement patterns" (Nelson 1997, 16). Comparison with Old Babylonian inheritance texts made by Kitz (Kitz 2000) does not undermine the sacral dimension of lot casting in the book of Joshua.

²¹ Boling 1982, 347-8.

²² Aharoni 1966, 231.

highlands through the Shephelah and the coastal plain to Jabneel, is an exception. But Judah in general is described much more thoroughly than any other tribal territory.

As concerns the plain of Jezreel, the author of the boundary descriptions gives up any attempt at all to draw there a boundary line comparable to those drawn in the highlands. The cities that are closer to the southern edge of the plain belong to Manasseh, and those that are closer to the northern edge to the Galilean tribes, but the boundary itself is not delineated.

The peripheral status of the plains, where the main economic and commercial hubs of the region were situated, definitely speaks against the presumed fiscal character of the boundary system. Already Alt (1927, 194) pointed out that the inclusion of the coastal plain within the allotments of the highlands tribes should not be regarded as reflecting any political or administrative reality.

There is, however, one exception to the overall rule that the plains are on the periphery of the boundary system. This exception is the Gilgal/Jericho area.

The role of the Gilgal area in the Joshua narrative and in the boundary system

Before the Land allotment the main stage for the Joshua narrative is the Jordan plain near Jericho, and more specifically Gilgal, located at the eastern outskirts of Jericho (4:19). It was at Gilgal that the Israelites camped after the crossing of the Jordan, were circumcised and celebrated the first Passover in the Land (Josh 4-5). It was there that Joshua set up twelve stones taken from the Jordan as an everlasting reminder of the miracle that had accompanied the crossing of the Jordan (4:20-24). Thus, according to Joshua, Gilgal became the first Israelite sanctuary in the Cisjordan (the cultic function of erected stones in the West Semitic world is well attested both in the Bible and outside it). Though in the following chapters the action moves to Jericho, Ai and Mount Ebal, in 9:6 and 10:6 the Israelites are back at their camp at Gilgal. They return to the camp after the battle of Gibeon (10:15), as well as after the conquest of southern Canaan (10:43).

The prominent place of Gilgal in Joshua 4-10 is conspicuous. Some commentators go as far as to assert that "the sanctuary at Gilgal is the place of origin of the traditions of the first part of the book, for it was there that they were gathered together and from thence that they were handed on"²³.

The allotment itself, according to the received text of Joshua, is effected in two stages (chapters 14-17 and 18-19, respectively). As concerns the first stage, its narrative setting (14:6) implies that the Israelites are still at Gilgal. The commentators (if they bother at all to localize Josh 14-17) usually call the first stage of the allotment "The Division of Territory carried out at Gilgal".²⁴

Stage two of the allotment has a separate introduction (18:1-10), which clearly detaches it from the first stage. It takes place in Shiloh, as stated explicitly in 18:1 and 19:51. Shiloh is not mentioned in Joshua before 18:1, Gilgal is never mentioned after. When the main narrative resumes, after the Land division, the main stage of the narrative is in Shiloh (22:9, 12), until, in the final chapter, it moves to Shechem.

I am aware that the different locations of the Israelite camp in the book of Joshua are likely to belong to different traditions or different literary strata of the book. Still, whatever might have been the prehistory of the book, its final shape betrays careful and symmetrical organization, which is worthy of our attention. The movements of the main camp of the Israelites are presented in the following way:

²³ Soggin 1972, 9.

²⁴ Soggin 1972, 159.

Preparation for Land division:

Preparation for crossing the Jordan: the camp at Shittim (2:1; 3:1)

The Conquest: the camp at Gilgal (4:19-20; 5:9-10; 9:6; 10:6-9, 15, 43)

The Land division:

First stage: the camp at Gilgal (14:6)

Second stage: the camp at Shiloh (18:1, 8-10; 19:51)

Establishing the levitical cities: the camp at Shiloh (21:2)

Aftermath of the Land division:

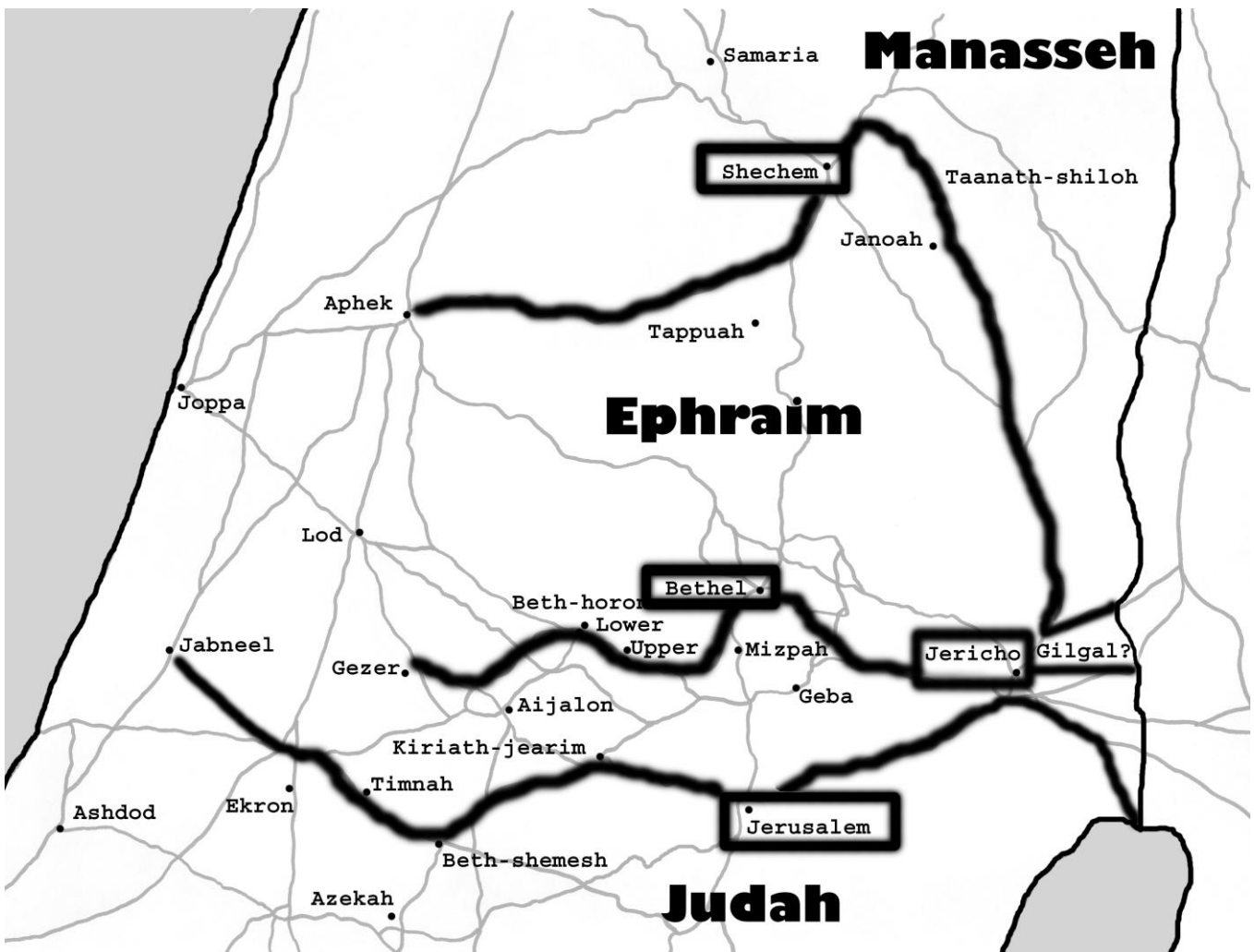
The return of the Transjordanian tribes: the camp at Shiloh (22:9, 12)

The renewal of the Covenant: the camp at Shechem (24:1, 25)

Far from being an awkward addition to the Conquest narrative, the story of the Land allotment is delicately linked with the preceding and following narratives. One can even claim that it forms the heart of the book of Joshua (at least in its final form): in both the large and the small chiasmic structures beloved of Hebrew narrative, the most important passages are usually sandwiched in the middle.

The first stage of the land allotment, as it is depicted in the book, is the most important: the tribe of Judah and the tribes of Joseph, the core tribes of the Southern and Northern Kingdoms respectively, receive their inheritances. I consider that placing this most important stage at Gilgal is a direct continuation of the role that Gilgal played in the preceding Conquest narrative.

The boundaries between these tribes (the northern boundary of Judah, the southern boundary of Ephraim and the boundary between Ephraim and Manasseh) divide the heart of the Promised Land into four areas running east-west, thus forming the core of the boundary system.



All three boundary lines conform to the same pattern. The big cities of Jerusalem, Beth-El and Shechem, all lying along the watershed (and along the main north-south highlands road) serve as points of reference for the boundaries: Judah is the land south of Jerusalem, Benjamin lies between Jerusalem and Beth-El, Ephraim between Beth-El and Shechem, and Manasseh to the north of Shechem. The boundaries pass in close proximity to these cities, in all three cases slightly to the south of them. The western halves of the boundaries are drawn from these cities westward down the slopes and then, in a very schematic way, to the sea. Below we shall see that they generally followed the major east-west roads of the highlands.

To the east of the watershed the three boundaries all head toward the Gilgal/Jericho region. Below we shall propose that in doing this they also followed the main roads of ancient Palestine. Having entered the Jordan plain in the vicinity of Jericho, the boundaries run eastwards to the river Jordan in such a way that the area of the Jordan plain near Jericho, not more than 20 km from north to south, is divided by east-west borders between four tribes! This turns the Gilgal/Jericho area into a "Cisjordan in miniature", but can hardly correspond with the historical or administrative reality of any period of the monarchy. To interpret the tribal borders in this region as administrative boundaries (for example, of the monarchic period) means to admit that narrow east-west stretches of land in the Jordan valley, adjacent to each other, were assigned to four different administrative regions, whose centers lay far away, in the mountains.

Rather than imagining such a strange administrative division of the kingdom of Israel, one should relate this feature of the boundary system to the role that the Gilgal area plays in Josh 4-14. The main tribes of Israel receive their lots in Gilgal. This is the first Israelite area in Cisjordan. The lots are narrow strips of land in this very area, which afterwards expand to the west to include the highland area associated with the given tribe, and finally reach the sea.

The unnatural (at least for an administrative border) character of the tribal boundaries in this area is especially conspicuous in the case of the boundary between Ephraim and Manasseh (16:6-7). Having approached the Jordan Valley near the Adam fords, the border makes a long and seemingly unnecessary detour to the south, only to assign to Manasseh a narrow barren strip of land along Jordan. What was the reason for Manasseh to claim this territory, almost devoid of any settlements, unfit for economic activity, and difficult to defend? The only conceivable reason is to have a share in the Gilgal area.

The eastern part of the boundary between Ephraim and Manasseh (16:7), as Aharoni rightly observes, "corresponded to the southern border of the House of Joseph". This means that Ephraim's share in the Jericho plain is a narrow "corridor" from Mount Ephraim to the Jordan with an (almost?) zero width. Aharoni refuses to take this at face value and accordingly, refuses to ascribe to Ephraim any portion of the Jordan plain at all²⁵. This makes the border system more "natural", but explicitly contradicts the biblical text. To adhere to the text we must give up any attempt to make the boundaries in this region meaningful from the administrative or political point of view.

The course of the northern border of Judah (= the southern boundary of Benjamin) in this area has also puzzled the scholars. If the biblical Beth-Hoglah and Beth-Arabah are to be identified, as it is customarily done, with modern 'Ain Hajlah and 'Ain el-Gharabeh²⁶, then, as Kallai rightly states, "the border runs in a peculiar arc from the mouth of the Jordan past

²⁵ Aharoni 1967, 236. See also the relevant map (Aharoni 1967, 229).

²⁶ Thus, e.g. Gray 1967, 141; Soggin 1972, 173; Boling 1982, 366. On the other hand, Fritz (1994, 159) rejects these identifications, since the only basis for them is the phonetic similarity of the Biblical names and later Arabic names (no Iron Age remains have been found in the area of 'Ain Hajlah and 'Ain el-Gharabeh). Still the criterion of phonetic similarity is usually fairly reliable with regard to the toponyms of Palestine.

the vicinity of Jericho"²⁷. The reason for this "peculiar arc" is the same as for the unnatural configuration of the eastern section of the Manasseh-Ephraim boundary: to ensure that the tribe of Judah has a share in the Gilgal area.

The order in which the tribes are dealt with and the political ideal of Joshua-Kings

The order in which the tribes are treated has no connection with the order of birth of the eponymous ancestors of the tribes in the Genesis narratives. Neither does it correlate with the location of the tribes on the south-north axis (as in Num 34:16-29). It depends rather on two different factors²⁸. (1) Political significance: the core tribes of the south and north are treated first, at the Gilgal stage of allotment. (2) Affiliation with south or north: at the first stage the main southern tribe (i.e. Judah) is treated before the main northern tribes (i.e. the tribes of Joseph); at the second stage the "secondary" southern tribe (Simeon) is treated before the "secondary" northern tribes (Zebulon, Issachar, Asher and Naphtali).

The tribe of Benjamin, located in between the core tribes of the South and North, is treated immediately after the core tribes of the two kingdoms. Thus Benjamin turns out to be not only in the middle of the Promised Land, but also in the middle of its description.

The tribe of Dan, with its shifting location, was treated last (and, as we have seen, without any boundary description at all).

Thus the order in which the tribes are treated may be represented by the following scheme.

Gilgal stage: core tribes of the two kingdoms:

- A) South:
 - Judah
- B) North:
 - Ephraim, Manasseh

Shiloh stage: subordinate tribes:

- Center:
 - Benjamin
- A') South:
 - Simeon
- B') North:
 - Zebulon, Issachar, Asher and Naphtali.
- A special case:
 - Dan.

It is important that the core tribes of the northern kingdom are given an honorable place immediately after Judah. The vision of a unified "Greater Israel", with a balance of North and South, is dominant in this text.

The balance between northern and southern Israelite tribes is of special importance for the whole corpus of historical books from Joshua through Kings, the "Deuteronomistic history" (compare the parallel treatment of the history of Israel and Judah in Kings with the presentation of the Chronicler, centered exclusively on the southern kingdom). Throughout

²⁷ Kallai 1986, 119

²⁸ See the comparative treatment of the order of the tribes in various sections of the Bible in Kallai 1997.

the deuteronomistic corpus it is asserted that "the land is the inheritance of *all* Israel... the unity of Israel is important; it is almost as though it reflects the oneness of God, so that disunity is contrary to the will of Yahwe"²⁹.

Of course, this vision of a unified Israel contrasts with the reality of Israelite history ("Manasseh devours Ephraim, Ephraim Manasseh, together they turn against Judah" according to Isa 9:20 [9.21 in most English versions]), but coincides with the prophet's hopes ("Ephraim will no longer be jealous of Judah nor Judah any longer hostile to Ephraim" in Isa 11:13). The narrator joins together Judah and Joseph (and the tribes subordinate to them) in the same way as Ezekiel does in his symbolic action of 37:15-19: "The word of the LORD came to me: Mortal, take a stick and write on it, "For Judah, and the Israelites associated with it"; then take another stick and write on it, "For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with it"; and join them together into one stick, so that they may become one in your hand. And when your people say to you, "Will you not show us what you mean by these?" say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD: I am about to take the stick of Joseph (which is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with it; and I will put the stick of Judah upon it, and make them one stick, in order that they may be one in my hand."

Note that the unity/disunity of Israel is described in the above mentioned prophetic texts as alliance/animosity between the same core tribes of the two kingdoms that occupy the first place in the land allotment (being dealt with at "Gilgal stage").

This political ideal of a balance between the north and the south influences not only the order the tribes are dealt with during the land allotment, but also the course of the boundaries as well. At least, this seems to be so in the case of Jerusalem.

The land of Benjamin in Joshua 14-19 and the balance between North and South

In the boundary system of Joshua, the stretch of land between the inheritances of Judah and Joseph (between the South and the North) is not only the geographical, but also the sacral center of the Promised Land. It comprises both Gilgal, (the first Israelite sanctuary in the Land) and the city of Jebus (the future holy city of Jerusalem)³⁰. It is interesting that this stretch, the most important of all, remains unassigned and ownerless at the first stage of the land allotment. Only at the second stage, at Shiloh, will it be assigned to Benjamin. Its central place, between North and South, its link with central sanctuaries and its being unassigned (at the first stage) to any particular tribe remind us of the "sacred reserve" (*tərûmāh*) of Ezek 47-48.

The extent of the promised Land of Ezek 47-48 is essentially identical with that described in Num 34 and presupposed in Josh 13-19. In all three texts the Jordan serves as the eastern border of the Land. Contrary to Numbers and Joshua, Ezekiel chooses to place all the twelve tribes of Israel in the Land, and this makes him squeeze Reuben and Gad in between the Cisjordanian tribes. The land is divided by east-west boundaries into parallel strips, assigned to different tribes (which may remind us of the more or less east-west direction of the intertribal boundaries drawn at Gilgal). The order in which the tribes are listed and placed on the map has little to do with the real geography of the Iron Age Cisjordan and is irrelevant for the present study.

²⁹ Curtis 1994, 18.

³⁰ Mowinckel suggested that the boundaries of Benjamin's inheritance in Joshua should rather be understood as the boundaries of "the King's private domain — Jerusalem and environs" (Mowinckel 1964, 71). As to "the King's private domain", it seems to have been transplanted by Mowinckel to Israelite soil from mediaeval Europe. However, his intuition that the land of Benjamin in the system of tribal inheritances is more than just one tribal territory among others seems to be justified.

The most interesting feature of the Land division by Ezekiel is the "sacred reserve" (*tərûmāh*), an area running east-west right in the middle of the Land, which belongs to no tribe. It houses the central administration (the seat of the "prince"), the City and the Sanctuary. Why did the author of Ezek 48 take all these functions away from the tribe of Judah? Obviously he was driven by the same vision of "Greater Israel", and the same desire for balance between North and South, that we have already spoken about with regard to the book of Joshua. The balance between North and South requires placing the most important institutions on "neutral land". Within the framework of Ezekiel this is the *tərûmāh*. Within the framework of Josh 14-19 the neutral land between north and south is the land of Benjamin: the boundary system of Joshua is supposed to divide the whole Cisjordan between the tribes, without any remainder like the *tərûmāh* of Ezekiel. Still it is interesting that the "neutral land" acquires an owner, the tribe of Benjamin, only at the second stage of the Land distribution.

Once again, there is an obvious correspondence between the central role of the land of Benjamin in the boundary system and its central role in the narrative of Joshua. Indeed, most of the stories related in Josh 1-10 are placed in the territory of Benjamin, in the regions near Jericho, Ai and Gibeon. Does this tell us something about the author's background? Is it somehow related to the prominent place that the land of Benjamin occupies in the narratives of Samuel and Saul? Or does the central role of the Benjamin area both in the geographical and the narrative chapters of Joshua merely follow from its central position between the "core" tribes of Judah and Joseph?

The case of Jerusalem

The attribution of Jerusalem (Jebus) in the book of Joshua to the inheritance of Benjamin is puzzling. The historical books of the Bible tell us that Jerusalem since the days of David was the capital of the kingdom of Judah. Prior to this did not belong to any Israelite tribe at all.

Note especially that the boundary is drawn almost along the southern walls of the city (along the southern slopes of Jebus). If it were a real administrative boundary, this would have meant that the peasants from the valley of Rephaim and the shepherds from the slopes opposite Jerusalem were administered not from Jerusalem, but from some distant locality in the Judean mountains (Bethlehem? Hebron?).

To be fair, a clear distinction between Judah and Jerusalem is sometimes observable in the Bible. One should pay attention to the formula "Judah *and* Jerusalem", often encountered in 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chr, Isa and Jer.³¹ Probably this reflects some important social difference between Jerusalem and the Judean countryside³². Neh 11:30 is especially conspicuous in stating that the people of Judah "were living all the way from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom". Thus the Valley of Hinnom, which was the southern limit of the city proper, forms the northern border of the territory of the people of Judah not only in Josh 15:8, but in Neh 11:30 as well. Jerusalem is a city apart.

The logic of the boundary system could not tolerate independent status for Jerusalem and required that the city be included into one of the tribal territories. Why Benjamin and not Judah? The best explanation, to my mind, is that in the united Israel, comprising both North and South, the sacral center must lie neither in the south, nor in the north, but between the two

³¹ Historical books: 2 Kings 18:22; 21:12; 23:1, 2, 24; 24:20; 1 Chr 5:41; 2 Chr 2:6; 11:14; 20:5, 15, 17, 18, 20, 27; 21:13; 24:6, 9, 18, 23; 28:10; 29:8; 32:25, 33; 33:9; 34:3, 5, 29, 30; 35:24; 36:4, 10. Several examples may be also found in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

³² Thus, for example, Gray 1967, 142.

rival regions. This means in the "central strip", and in the context of Joshua this is the land of Benjamin.

The metaphor of "going" in the boundary descriptions and the notion of land appropriation through survey

Finally, let us turn to the form of the boundary descriptions. Border descriptions from the Ancient Near East (such as those in Hittite treaties, and in documents from Ugarit) contain only border points without any connecting words. In several Akkadian documents from Ugarit the border points are connected to each other with prepositions (*adu*, *adi* and *qadu*), but not with verbs³³. The same pattern for describing boundaries (border points connected to each other with prepositions *min* and *ʿad*) is employed in the Hebrew Bible as well, for example in Gen 10:19; Judg 1:36; 11:22; Ezek 47:15-20; 48:1-28; Deut 3:12-17.

Only in Num 34 and Josh 15-19 are the border points linked together with verbs. Almost all the verbs are verbs of motion: *hālak* "to go", *yāṣā* "to go out", *yārad* "to go down", *ʿālā* "to go up", *ʿābar* "to go past", *pānā* "to turn". The only link verb whose primary meaning is not related to the description of a person's movement is the verb *tāʿar* (which is ordinarily translated as "to change direction", but is not used with this meaning in the Bible with an animate subject).

The abundance of verbs of motion makes one perceive the boundary description almost as an itinerary that runs along the borders. As Bächli put it in his article on the Joshua boundary system: "Die Verba der Bewegung wollen begehbare und überschaubare Gebiete beschreiben. Des Menschen Mass ist der Fuss!.. Die Grenzen werden abgeschritten... — hinauf, hinunter, hinüber, hinaus, nach allen Himmelsrichtungen."³⁴ Wazana has the same feeling: "With the help of the verbs of motion the writer follows the boundary line as an excursionist, from one boundary point to another"³⁵. Though I disagree with Bächli and Wazana with regard to the original *Sitz im Leben* of these texts, I cannot but share in this impression: it is as if the author of the boundary descriptions invites us to follow him in some virtual land survey along the boundary lines.

The subject of the verbs of motion is invariably "the boundary" (*qəbûl*); still it is not the boundary itself, that moves, but the "virtual observer", whose movements are reflected in the boundary descriptions. The usage of the verb *šûb* "to return" is especially significant. For example, the southern boundary of Zebulun is described as first "going" westward, from Sarid to the vicinity of Jokneam, and then "returning" to Sarid in order to go eastward, from Sarid to mount Tabor. A literal rendering of this passage would produce the impression of a crazy zigzag-like boundary. However it is not the boundary, but the "virtual observer", who makes these zigzag movements along the boundary and whom we are invited by the author to follow.

One can compare these "itinerary-like" descriptions with true itineraries from the Bible, such as the description of Joshua's campaign in southern Canaan in Josh 10:29-39. The movements of the army are described with the same verbs of motion that we have encountered in the boundary descriptions: *ʿābar* (in most cases), *ʿālā* (to describe the movement from the Shephelah to the highlands) and *šûb* (to describe movement that includes partial return).

As far as I know, this "itinerary-like" pattern for describing boundaries is alien to other Ancient Near Eastern cultures and seems to be coined by the author(s) of Josh 15-19 and Num 34:3-12. (The usage of this metaphor in modern languages, which perhaps goes back to Bible

³³ Hess 1994a.

³⁴ Bächli 1973, 12-13.

³⁵ Wazana 2000, 179.

translations, conceals from us its novelty for the world of the Ancient Near East.) Does this metaphor reflect any particular notion of the biblical authors?

It has often been mentioned by traditional commentators on Gen 13:17 that walking through a piece of land represents in the (post)biblical tradition its symbolic appropriation. Benno Jacob writes in his commentary on Gen. 13:17³⁶: “Ein Grundstück wird, nach R. Eliezer, durch Begehen (der Länge und Breite nach) erworben”. The link between walking on the land and its appropriation is reflected also in the imagery of Deut 1:36, 11:24, Josh 1:3, 14:9.

From the extrabiblical parallels to this notion, C. Westermann³⁷ cites the Iliad (I, 37), and Daube³⁸ finds analogies in Roman Law (Justinian, *Digest* 41 2.3.1). In a more explicit form the idea of land appropriation through survey is represented in Josh 18:1-9, where tribal representatives are sent “to make a survey of the land and to write a description of it, according to the inheritance of each tribe”. This story, of course, forms a narrative background for the description of the tribal boundaries.

Daube speaks at length about ancient ideas of land acquisition through pointing land out and seeing it, through stepping on it or walking through it. “Whether Hebrew law actually recognized all these forms of acquisition,” writes Daube, “is quite uncertain. But it is also irrelevant as far as our investigation is concerned. What is relevant is that these forms existed in popular legal thought... and that they would be introduced, as having legal effect, in saga and legend.”³⁹

It is relevant for the present investigation as well. I propose that it was the idea of land appropriation through survey that influenced the form of the boundary descriptions in Numbers and Joshua. Using the “itinerary-like” pattern for the boundary descriptions the author invites his readers to join him in going around the tribal areas and, in doing this, to take part in the appropriation of the Promised Land carried out by Joshua and his contemporaries. This means that this pattern also is rooted in the biblical theology of the Land.

Boundaries along roads?

So, if we are right, the author of the Joshua boundary descriptions invites the readers to make a virtual tour around the tribal areas. It would be interesting to check whether he actually proposes to do so by going along the roads of the southern Levant.

A similarity between the tribal boundaries and the course of the roads has often been noticed: “Oft ist der Grenzverlauf mit dem Verlauf der Strasse identisch”⁴⁰. Dorsey, the author of the most thorough treatment of the Iron Age Cisjordanian road system, states straightforwardly: “The boundaries in Josh 15-19 generally seem to have followed roads”.⁴¹

More specifically, Dorsey indicates that both the eastern and the western parts of Judah’s northern border simply followed the east-west roads of Judea, from Jerusalem to Jericho, and from Jerusalem to Ekron⁴². The western segment of the boundary between Benjamin and Ephraim coincides with the Beth-Horon road, the most important east-west route in the whole Central Cisjordan. Aharoni suggests that “the ancient trade route (Darb el-

³⁶ Jacob 1934, 365.

³⁷ Westermann 1977, 211.

³⁸ Daube 1947, 38.

³⁹ Daube 1947, 37.

⁴⁰ Bächli 1973, 12.

⁴¹ Dorsey 1991, 205.

⁴² Dorsey 1991, 187-188, 205.

Hawarnah)... evidently served as the central dividing line between the Galilean tribes – Naphtali and Asher on the north, Issachar and Zebulun on the south”⁴³. The issue will be treated in more detail in the Appendix.

Interestingly enough, having noticed that the boundaries in Joshua tend to follow the roads of the ancient Palestine, Bächli and Dorsey did not ask themselves what may lie behind this unusual phenomenon. Normally, the administrative regions of a country are formed around its biggest cities, which serve as the major transportation hubs of the country, and as its main crossroads. The regional capitals tend to lie more or less in the center of the respective region: cases of regional capitals being located at the regional boundary are exceptional. The main roads of the country link the biggest cities with one another in such a way that interregional borders tend to cross these roads rather than follow them.

From this point of view the boundary system of Joshua is definitely abnormal. The major roads are not linking different territories but separating them. The major cities of Cisjordan (including Jerusalem, Bethel, Shechem) are located exactly on the boundary lines.

As soon as we admit that the Joshua boundaries are not real borders but rather the itineraries around the tribal areas, the riddle is solved. It was the image of the surveyors going around the tribal allotments that made the author of the boundary descriptions draw segments of the boundaries along roads, and thus inevitably through major crossroads (cities) of Cisjordan.

Summary

The whole complex of the geographical materials in Josh 13-19 serves to describe and detail the gift of God to Israel. The author of these chapters has drawn on different sources: the traditional division of the Cisjordan, oral lore and written documents. As for the boundary descriptions, it seems that most features of the boundary system fit the literary and theological context of the Bible much better than any supposed administrative or political context.

This concerns:

-- the scope of the system (the inclusion of Philistia and the exclusion of the Transjordan):

-- the course of the boundaries (attribution of Jerusalem to Benjamin; division of the small Gilgal area into four strips; the peripheral status of the plains):

-- the unique literary form of the boundary descriptions (the writer follows the boundary line as a surveyor, inviting the reader to take part in the Land appropriation):

-- the imprecise character of most descriptions.

The central role of the Jericho/Gilgal area in the Joshua narrative on the one hand and in the boundary system on the other speaks in favor of the substantial unity of the book of Joshua⁴⁴. This is further supported by the impression that the very form of the boundary descriptions was influenced by the image of land appropriation through survey (Josh 18:1-9).

⁴³ Aharoni 1966, 239.

⁴⁴ Among the authors who, despite the predominant tendency, have treated the story of the land appropriation as an integral part of the main stratum of Joshua one should mention Auld (1980, 52-71) and Fritz (1994, 7 and *passim*).

APPENDIX.**THE TRIBAL BOUNDARIES AND THE ROADS OF ANCIENT PALESTINE**

Since we have suggested that the tribal boundaries may have been conceived, at least partly, as itineraries encircling the tribal allotments, we should look more closely at the relationship between the Joshua boundaries and the Iron Age roads. The course of these roads is not easy to establish, since they were not engineered. Still, the remains of forts and way stations, the course of roads in later period (especially Roman roads), and general knowledge about the terrain provide us with important indirect information⁴⁵.

The northeastern boundary of Judah

The northeastern border of Judah (15:5-7) starts at the mouth of Jordan. Since the area was not inhabited, nor used for any economic activity, this part of the boundary line should be considered purely symbolic.

The next border points mentioned, Beth-Hoglah and Beth-Arabah, are usually sought in the vicinity of modern 'Ain Hajlah and 'Ain el-Gharabeh respectively, about 10 km south-east of ancient Jericho and probably just a couple of kilometres to the south of the yet unidentified Gilgal. From the southern vicinity of Jericho/Gilgal the boundary goes to Jerusalem. The border points here are impossible to identify with certainty,⁴⁶ except the ascent of Adummim and En-Shemesh. The ascent of Adummim is unanimously identified with the area of partly red rocks around Khan el-Ahmar, through which all the roads connecting Jerusalem with the Jericho area passed (and still pass). En-Shemesh is usually considered to be the spring of Ein Haud, not far from the road from Jerusalem to Jericho through Bethany (el 'Azariyeh), which was in the Middle Ages (and still is) the main road between Old Jerusalem and Jericho. The association of these two places with the roads going from Jerusalem eastwards is conspicuous.

The existence of a road that connected Jerusalem with Jericho and the nearby Jordan fords should be assumed since at least as far back as the 7th century BCE, when Jericho entered the Judean sphere of influence. This road is explicitly mentioned in 2 Kings 25:4-5 (=Jer 52:7-8), where Zedekiah tries to flee from Jerusalem "by the road to the Arabah" but is captured by the Chaldeans near Jericho. It is also presupposed by the story of David's war with Absalom (2 Sam 15:13 — 16:13), where David and his army retreat from Jerusalem to the Transjordan past the Mount of Olives and the fords across the lower Jordan.

What was the course of that road? There are two natural passages from Old Jerusalem to the east. One is to the north of the Mount of Olives, past the modern Augusta Victoria area; the remains of a Roman road are to be found along this way. The other is to the south of the Mount of Olives, past Bethany and En-Shemesh/Ein Haud; this road is attested as early as New Testament times (Mk 10:46-11:1). Both roads were used in different periods of the city's existence, and Dorsey thinks both may have been in use already in the Iron Age. In the area of the Ascent of Adummim both roads converge, since this is the most natural passage from the Jerusalem region to the Jericho region.

Since Jerusalem is treated in Joshua as the boundary point between Judah and Benjamin, while the Gilgal area (the environs of Jericho) is the point where all the main tribal boundaries meet, it was quite natural for the author of the Joshua boundary descriptions to draw the border between Judah and Benjamin along the Jerusalem-Jericho road.

⁴⁵ See the discussion in Beitzel 1992.

⁴⁶ See overview of discussion in Kallai 1986, 119-120.

The northwestern boundary of Judah

From En-Shemesh/Ein Haud to Me-Nephtoah (almost unanimously identified with Lifta) the northern boundary of Judah skirts Jerusalem in a semicircular line. Most detailed of all the boundaries in Joshua, this semicircle is carefully drawn in such a way as to leave Jerusalem in the "middle" (Benjamin) strip of the Land.

From Me-Nephtoah the boundary runs, past Mount Ephron, thought by many to be the Qastal Range⁴⁷, to Kiriath-Yearim (usually identified with Abu Ghosh, now the modern Israeli town of Kiriath-Yearim). The stretch of land between Lifta and Kiriath-Yearim was (and still is) the main western gateway of Jerusalem. The Roman road from Jerusalem to Lydda and Joppa, the Turkish period road from Jerusalem westward, and the modern Highway 1 all go through it, with only slight variations in course.

It is generally thought that prior to the advent of Roman engineering techniques the easiest and, therefore, the main connection between Jerusalem and the coastal plain was the Jerusalem-Gibeon-Beth-Horon road. However, for those going from Jerusalem to the southern parts of the plain (for instance to Ekron) it was a detour. Moreover, the Beth-Horon road passed through territory whose ownership was disputed between northern and southern kingdoms. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that a direct road from Jerusalem westward (though secondary in significance with regard to the Beth-Horon road) may have emerged as early as in the Iron Age. Dorsey regards the Iron Age remains found at Lifta, Moza, Mevasseret Yerushalayim and Kiriath-Yearim as a definite proof of its existence⁴⁸. After Kiriath-Yearim, according to Dorsey⁴⁹, the Iron Age road turned in a south-westerly direction along Nahal Kesalon to Kesalon (Kasla), Eshtaol and Beth-Shemesh, and from there continued to Timnah (Tel Batash) and Ekron (Tel Miqne). All the localities mentioned so far (Lifta, Kiriath-Yearim, Kesalon, Beth-Shemesh, Timnah, and Ekron) are exactly the points through which the north-western boundary of Judah passed according to Josh 15. The triumphal return of the Ark from the Philistine captivity to Jerusalem also follows this route: Ekron-Beth-Shemesh-Kiriath-Yearim-Jerusalem.

If Dorsey is right in suggesting that the direct road from Jerusalem westward existed already at the time when the book of Joshua was written, the author of Joshua seems to have just followed its course to make the rough traditional division between Judah (to the south of Jerusalem) and Benjamin (to the north of Jerusalem) more precise. Indeed, the road from Jerusalem westward would have served this purpose ideally.

The southern boundary of Joseph

The southern border of the Joseph tribes (16:1-3) is described as going from Jericho to Beth-El, from the vicinity of Beth-El to Ataroth, then to Lower Beth-Horon, to the vicinity of Gezer, and westward to the sea. This boundary also served, naturally, as the southern border of Ephraim. Accordingly, the author of Joshua, instead of describing the southern border of Ephraim, needed only to mention the two middle points of this border, Ataroth and Upper Beth-Horon (16:5). One may conclude that the southern boundary of Ephraim passed through both Upper and Lower Beth-Horon, located not far from each other.

⁴⁷ Kallai 1986, 122.

⁴⁸ Dorsey 1991, 186-8 (Road J5).

⁴⁹ Dorsey 1991, 187 (road J5).

The description is confused in its middle part⁵⁰. On the contrary, the western and eastern segments of the boundary are clear. The western segment, from Upper Beth-Horon to Lower Beth-Horon and further to Gezer, coincides with the most important route that connected the hill country with the coastal plain. In fact this was the most important east-west road in the Central Cisjordan⁵¹

The description of the eastern segment, from Jericho to Beth-El, is clear but brief. Close links would have existed between the two cities, as we may infer from 1 Kings 16:34, which ascribes the rebuilding of Jericho under the Israelite monarchy to a citizen of Beth-El.

The eastern segment of the Ephraim/Manasseh boundary

The description of the northern border of Ephraim (16:6-8) starts from the central point (Michmethath), which, according to 17:7, is situated near Shechem, probably "to the east of Shechem". There have been numerous suggestions about the exact identification of Michmethath, but no consensus has been achieved, even with regard to whether a mountain, a valley or a settlement is meant; several places in the vicinity of Shechem (Khirbet Makhneh el-Foqa, Khirbet Julejil, Khirbet Kafr Beta, Jebel el-Kabir and Wadi Beidan) are all among the proposed candidates⁵². Identification of Ataroth and Naaratha is also problematic.

From Michmethath the border goes to Taanath-Shiloh and Janoah (whose identifications will be discussed later). From there, via Ataroth and Naaratha (neither is identifiable: Ataroth is obviously different from the border point of the same name on the southern border of Ephraim), the border proceeds to the northern outskirts of Jericho, and then to the river Jordan.

Prior to Na'aman 1986, the two middle points of the boundary (Taanath-Shilo and Janoah) were identified with Khirbet Ta'na el-Foqa, and Khirbet Yanun⁵³, respectively. The main criterion for these identifications was the assumption that the ancient names of the places may have survived in their modern Arabic names.

Na'aman (1986) wonders why the boundary drawn from the vicinity of Shechem to Khirbet Ta'na el-Foqa and Khirbet Yanun does not follow natural dividing lines. The boundary, he writes, "runs right through the mountainous area south-east of Shechem. This assumed delineation is surprising, since 7-9 km. north-east of it runs the deep valley of the Tirza river (Wadi Far'ah), which is the natural topographical boundary of the whole area. Was the tribal reality in this region so clear-cut that the author of the boundary system was obliged to mark the border in a way that conflicts with the natural topography?" Na'aman suggested that we discard the accepted identification of Taanath-Shiloh and Janoah because it does not conform to the natural topography⁵⁴. But why should we presuppose that the Joshua tribal boundaries must go along natural barriers?

Shechem in the middle of the mountains of the central Palestine was chosen by the author of Josh 16-17 as the main border point of the Ephraim-Manasseh boundary. Since the eastern part of the boundary had to touch the Gilgal area, one may suggest that it followed the

⁵⁰ Kallai 1986, 129-131, 143 thinks that in this text *Beth-El* and *Luza* are just two names of the same place. This is in line with Gen 28:10-22, but is impossible from the point of view of Hebrew syntax. Na'aman distinguishes between Beth-El the sanctuary and the settlement of Luz. Still another solution is to postulate a corruption in the text (thus Boling 1982, 396).

⁵¹ Dorsey 1991, 181-5 (Road J1); the stretch from Beth-Horon to Bethel may correspond to J1a. Dorsey suggests that the Beth-Horon road forked after Beth-Horon: one branch went to Gezer, the other to Lod (Roads J1/J3). See also THLSA, map 100.7.

⁵² See Na'aman 1986, 151-153; Kallai 1986, 150-151.

⁵³ Kallai 1986, 157-159.

⁵⁴ Na'aman 1986, 146, 153-7.

Iron Age road from Shechem to Jericho (taking into account the role of Shechem in the northern kingdom and the fact that Jericho was a part of the northern kingdom until it fell, such a road must have existed).

We have no indication of the course of that Iron Age road, but at least the Roman road from Shechem to Jericho followed exactly the same course as the traditionally reconstructed northeastern border of Ephraim, through the vicinity of Taanath-Shiloh and Janoah⁵⁵. The existence of an Iron Age road following the same course is quite probable⁵⁶.

The western segment of the Ephraim/Manasseh boundary

This segment is described twice: in a more succinct way in 16:8, and in a more detailed way in 17:7-9. From the central point (Michmethath) the border first goes in a southern direction towards the city of Tappuah (usually identified with Sheikh Abu Zarad, about 12 km to the south of Shechem by the watershed highway⁵⁷). Like Jerusalem, Tappuah lies on the border (*'el-gəbûl mənāšše*): the city itself belongs to Ephraim, but the neighboring territory ("the land of Tappuah") to Manasseh.

The next reference point is the brook of Kanah, modern wadi Qanah, which goes almost straight from east to west about five kilometers north of Sheikh Abu Zarad/Tappuah. Josh 17:9 defines the boundary course to the west of Tappuah in the following way: *wəyārad haggəbûl nahal qānā neqbā lannaḥal*. At first, *neqbā lannaḥal* seems to be an unnecessary addition with an unclear meaning. However, one may compare the syntax with that of 15:8 (*wə'ālā haggəbul gē ben-ḥinnōm 'el-ketef hayəbûsî minnegeb*). In both cases the verb, describing the boundary course (*yārad*, *'ālā*) is accompanied first by the name of the wadi along which the boundary went, then by an additional indication of the boundary's place on the north-south axis. In 15:8 the aim of this additional information was to make more explicit the position of Jerusalem vis-a-vis the boundary. In 17:9 the addition may mean that the boundary should follow the brook of Kana not exactly, but at some distance, more to the south. Indeed, since Tappuah itself is situated several kilometers south of the brook of Kana, the line drawn from Tappuah directly westward would pass not exactly along the brook, but a bit to the south.

The middle of 17:9 is unclear, and probably corrupt. The last part of 17:9 recapitulates that the territory to the north of the brook of Kana belongs to Manasseh and concludes with the standard formula *wayhî tôšə'ôtāw hayyammā*.

Though the picture is not completely clear, it is tempting again to compare it with the Iron Age road system. Dorsey⁵⁸ believes that the Iron Age road from southern Samaria to the coastal plain started just north of Tappuah and continued to the west more or less parallel to the brook of Kana, to the south of it. It connected the Shechem-Shiloh region with Aphek, the main city in this part of the coastal plain.

It was along this road, that the Ark left Samaria, in order to come to Judea via the Ekron-Beth-Shemesh-Kiriath-Jearim-Jerusalem road.

Since "Manasseh" was evidently the name of the hill country in the vicinity of Shechem and to the north of Shechem, the Tappuah-Aphek road was an obvious candidate for providing a western section for the boundary between Manasseh and Ephraim: the next east-west road to the north of it would have left Shechem in Ephraim's possession, while the next

⁵⁵ See *TIR. Map of Eretz Israel during the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods, North* (consultant Israel Roll) as well as *The Wide Screen Project, Student Map B "Ezra-Nehemiah through Justinian"* (ed. J. Monson).

⁵⁶ Dorsey 1991, 176-177 (Road S19/S19a).

⁵⁷ Kotter 1992.

⁵⁸ Dorsey 1991, 168 (road S6).

east-west road to the south of it would have assigned Beth-El to Manasseh. Tappuah lies more to the south than the beginning of the road from Shechem to Jericho past Khirbet Ta'na el-Foqa (along which, I believe, the eastern section of the border passed). Hence the necessity to join the eastern and the western sections of the boundary with a small north-south stretch, from Michmethath to En-Tappuah, along the watershed highway.

The Galilean tribes

The boundaries of the Galilean tribes are dealt with in 19:10-39, beginning with Zebulun. The starting point for describing the boundary of Zebulun is *šārîd*, usually emended to *šādûd* or *šādîd* and identified with Tel Shadud to the SE of Nazareth. If the emendation is accepted, the starting point of the Zebulun boundary turns out to be a major crossroads in the Galilee. Dorsey⁵⁹ describes Tel Shadud as the main entrance to the Galilee from the Megiddo region.

From Sarid/Tel Shadud the description of the Zebulun boundary proceeds first to the west, then to the east, continues in a counterclockwise direction northward and ends at Hannathon. The end point of the boundary, Hannathon, is mentioned already in the Amarna letters as a city past which went the trade route from Babylonia. It is identified with Tell Badawiya, a large tell dominating the major trade route between the northern Transjordan and coastal Palestine⁶⁰, the so-called Darb el-Hawarnah.

It seems that the boundary between the northern Galilean tribes (Naphtali and Asher) and the southern Galilean tribes (Issachar and Zebulun) just followed this route⁶¹. It may well be that other key points in the descriptions of the boundaries of the Galilee tribes were also major crossroads of the North, but the lack of scholarly consensus with regard to their identification urges one to be cautious.

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⁵⁹ Dorsey 1991, 91.

⁶⁰ Greenberg 1992.

⁶¹ Aharoni 1966, 239.

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ABBREVIATIONS

THLSA -- *The Holy Land Satellite Atlas*, vol. 1. Nicosia 1999.

TIR -- Y. Tsafir, L. Di Segni, J. Green. *Tabula Imperii Romani. Ioudaea. Palaestina*. Jerusalem 1994.